

A family affair

Parenting books offer tips for raising happy, healthy kids

BY KATHERINE WYRICK

This posse of parenting books is an eclectic bunch. As in a family, there are different personalities in the mix: some are rowdy, some serious and thoughtful, and still others practical in a no-frills kind of way. Some are verbose (with subtitles so long you'll feel as though you've read the book). And, of course, there is the ubiquitous class clown.

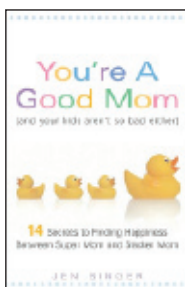
Not your Run-of-the-mill parent

Run DMC is humming a different tune these days. The rapper turned preacher and father, once famous for singing "Walk This Way," now preaches the parenting gospel, or, as we like to think of it "Parent this way." Rev Run and wife Justine Simmons, the stars of MTV's hit reality show "Run's House," share their advice for raising grounded kids in **Take Back Your Family** (Gotham, \$25, 288 pages, ISBN 9781592403813). They know a thing or two about this subject considering that they have six. Sure, there is the obligatory fancy crib that all celebrity-reality-TV families have (as in "Hogan Knows Best" or "The Osbournes"), complete with pool, tricked-out cars and electronics galore. But Rev and Justine have made it their top priority to bring their kids up with the right values and without a sense of entitlement. Rev issues a challenge to American parents with his title, and then shows you how to do it.



Solid as a Rock

Rose Rock, mother of actor/comedian Chris, must have a lot of energy. She certainly has a lot of sound advice, having raised 10 kids in addition to 17 foster children. In **Mama Rock's Rules** (Collins, \$22.95, 256 pages, ISBN 9780061536120), Rose discusses boundaries, discipline and how to keep it real in today's crazy culture. Helpful throughout are sections labeled "Mama's Mojo," in which Rock distills bits of wisdom into easily digestible bites. This supermom doesn't mince words, but she does suggest mincing an onion for her "Rock Style Beans and Franks" (the recipe is included along with a few other Rock family favorites). Maybe the secret to a happy childhood isn't fried chicken and biscuits, but, let's face it, comfort food helps. Both Rock and Rev Run stress an attitude of gratitude and a strong spiritual foundation. We shouted a big amen to the chapter "Reading Is Righteous." That applies to Mama Rock's book, too.



Good Mom (and your kids aren't so bad either): 14 Secrets to Finding Happiness Between Super Mom and Slacker Mom (Sourcebooks, \$13.95, 256 pages, ISBN 9781402211140). Tips like "Don't answer the phone when the class mom calls" and "Your kid's birthday party isn't your coming-out celebration" are right on target.

Blog baby

There's a trend afoot, or underfoot depending on your perspective, and it is this: the blogosphere and the world of publishing are beginning to overlap. Mom bloggers, and there are a lot of them, who've birthed and raised their little blogs, are now seeing them grow up into books. One of these blog babies is Jen Singer's **You're a**

In the section "Wedding Vows You Wish Your Husband Had Made" we find this: "I will never pretend that I can't hear the kids at night. I'll even start to get out of bed long before you sigh angrily and throw the blankets off." This guide is for both the perfectionist mom, laminated flash cards at the ready, and the mom who genuinely believes that Pop-Tarts are a healthy breakfast choice.

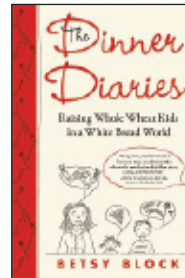
The good fight

Letters to a Bullied Girl (Harper, \$14.95, 240 pages, ISBN 9780061544620), subtitled "Messages of Healing and Hope: One Bullied Girl, Two Sisters Who Cared, and Thousands More Who Opened up Their Hearts," is both a heart-wrenching and heartwarming story. Today's bully isn't just the punk who steals your lunch money on the playground; the contemporary bully is a lot scarier, and armed with technology. Olivia Gardner, a young girl from Northern California, was relentlessly harassed by classmates, online and otherwise, for more than two years. Her story became a sort of rallying cry

for anti-bullying advocates nationwide. What's uplifting about this story is what happened next—two sisters, Emily and Sarah Buder, began to write to the traumatized Olivia in an effort to help her. Though sometimes painful to read, this collection is for teachers and parents who have been touched by what has become an epidemic in schools across the country.

The food fight

If you can relate to the following insight from food writer and mother of two Betsy Block, you just might

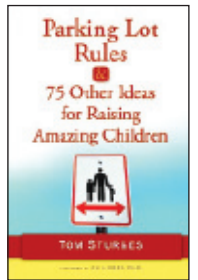


have a picky eater yourself: "I'd always thought food was pretty straightforward: you're hungry, you eat; you're not, you don't. Then I became a mother." Block's book **The Dinner Diaries: Raising Whole Wheat Kids in a White Bread World** (Algonquin, \$14.95, 261 pages, ISBN 9781565125704) provides humor and hints for the mother who's feeling disheartened about her family's eating habits. Block tries to fight the good fight when it comes to healthy eating, and to do that she has to get creative, and we don't just mean cutting sandwiches into enticing shapes. But it's an uphill battle with a son who thinks candy is a food group and a daughter whose dietary repertoire consists only of white bread.

Block's tone is casual and her writing accessible. With **The Dinner Diaries**, she's dished up a funny, candid portrait of a family trying to eat, and live, more consciously.

Father knows best

Parking Lot Rules & 75 Other Ideas for Raising Amazing Children (Ballantine, \$20, 224 pages, ISBN 9780345503732) by Tom Sturges reads like an informal letter to fellow parents, just one dad sharing a "lot" of advice with another. Sturges lost his father, filmmaker Preston Sturges, when he was a child, and writing this book was a way for him to heal old wounds as well as share his own experience of being a father. Rule #1 is, no surprise, **The Parking Lot Rule**: whenever you are in a parking lot—or any dangerous place—yell out "Parking lot rules" indicating your child should come immediately to your side. (Wouldn't "Heel!" be shorter?) This directive encapsulates Sturges' overall message, namely that remaining closely connected to your kids is of the utmost importance. ♡



Sex sells, and kids pay the price

On a recent trip to Target I picked up what I thought was a pair of plain shorts for my six-year-old daughter (the only ones I could find that weren't obscenely short) only to discover the word "Rockstar" written in glitter across the bottom. No, thank you. I prefer clothes that are all cotton, preferably organic and made of 100-percent non-tacky material. Am I the only parent who doesn't want her daughter to look like a Poison groupie? Then why all the Bratz dolls, age-inappropriate outfits and disturbing TV images? Barbie is starting to look wholesome by comparison.

Thankfully, there is **So Sexy So Soon: The New Sexualized Childhood and What Parents Can Do to Protect Their Kids** (Ballantine, \$25, 240 pages, ISBN 9780345505064). This is the must-read parenting book of the bunch. In it, the authors explore how sexuality in mass media affects our children. They also offer strategies for counteracting the negative messages our kids are receiving—and not just girls. One of the many laudable things about **So Sexy** is that it explains how boys are targeted, too.

Written by two internationally recognized experts in early childhood development and the impact of the media on children and teens, Diane E. Levin, Ph.D., and Jean Kilbourne, Ed.D., **So Sexy So Soon** is an invaluable and practical guide for parents who are alarmed by the media's assault on girls and boys. The authors understand that

we can't escape our commercial culture, but, they argue, we can be agents of change. Here they provide strategies for a counterattack, like encouraging more imaginative play and setting limits on TV and other media when your children are at one another's houses. We'd be remiss if we didn't also mention another recent release that addresses the same topic, albeit with more of a focus on the female gender: **The Lolita Effect: The Media Sexualization of Young Girls and What We Can Do About It** (Overlook, \$24.95, 320 pages, ISBN 9781590200636) by M. Gigi Durham. Durham also cites pop culture—and advertising in particular—as the cause of multiple societal ills. Like Levin and Kilbourne, she, too, offers helpful strategies for empowering girls to make healthy decisions about their own sexuality. ♡



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